

# Fatherhood is key to addressing social issues, says council chair

WCBU | By **Joe Deacon**

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*The Illinois Council On Responsible Fatherhood / Facebook*

The Illinois Council on Responsible Fatherhood strives to promote the importance paternal involvement in children's lives. The council will hold its annual symposium on Saturday in Galesburg.

Jeffrey Leving believes the value of parental involvement in the lives of their children cannot be overestimated.

"It's very, very important to make sure that all children in the state of Illinois have the best opportunities to a future and to have a healthy childhood," said Leving, who serves as chairman for the **Illinois Council on Responsible Fatherhood**.

Established by the state legislature in 2004, the Council aims to increase the number of kids that grow up with a responsible father figure in their lives.

"If you look at the statistics, you'll see that children that have grown up fatherless are more likely to have educational issues. They're more likely to have psychological

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In working to raise public awareness about how the absence of a father impacts a child's life, Leving stresses that both mothers and fathers are very critical to kids' upbringing. He notes that nearly 40% of children are born out of wedlock.

He also believes that promoting fatherhood can help communities like Peoria address social issues such as poverty and violence.

"Children with involved fathers, they can do better in school; they can have better physical and mental health; many do better in life economically, and they're less likely to be involved in crime," Leving said. "For instance, the most reliable predictor of crime in America is father absence – and I'm talking about crime where the (offenders) are not only the defendants in these criminal cases, but also the victims in society."

The Council will hold its annual symposium Saturday at the Galesburg Public Library from noon-2 p.m. Scheduled speakers include Leving, Galesburg Mayor Peter Schwartzman, Knox College men's basketball coach Ben Davis, Fatherhood Educational Institute president Maureen Gorman, and Rev. James Hailey, who chairs Streak Dads, a program at Galesburg High School that provides father figures for students in need.



*Courtesy The Law Offices Of Jeffrey M. Leving / James Anderson*

Illinois Council on Responsible Fatherhood chairman Jeffrey Leving

Leving said the notion that a father's role in raising children is less significant than a mother's is an outdated belief.

"It could go back as far as the Industrial Revolution in this country, where fathers were frequently not home because they were working incredible hours to put food on the table so their children could eat and their families could survive," he said. "So mothers had to function as a primary – and sometimes the exclusive – parent. Because of that,

Leving said those stereotypes are very problematic and need to change.

"I believe that the best parent is both parents; I think children should have a wonderful mother and a wonderful father," he said. "That's, unfortunately, not always a reality. And if it isn't a reality, children should have some support, even if it's not a biological mother and father, it should be a mother figure and a father figure. They need to have the support they need to grow and become successful in life."

Leving said it's important for fathers who live apart from their kids to find ways of maintaining a presence in their lives.

"I've talked to many fathers who are not custodial parents – some of them don't live in the United States, some of them are in the military and they're serving overseas – and it's very difficult," he said. "But now with technology, many can maintain contact with their children even when they're in another country through Zoom. Telephonic contact is still important, but Zoom is better because they can visually see each other."

"I believe most communication is actually nonverbal, and with Zoom you can have that nonverbal communication," he said. "Without Zoom, limited to a telephone, it's all audio where you lose a lot of the important communication bonding that can be very valuable. But telephone contact is better than no contact. So I believe that all parents should do everything possible to have a positive relationship in contact with their children, but it's not easy."

The symposium hopes to attract an audience that includes policy makers, social workers, family counselors, educators, child development experts and other interested members of the general public. Leving believes the symposium will provide one key takeaway.

"Hope," he said. "I'm hoping all the attendees walk away with hope for a better world for all children."

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